

I thank my friend from Missouri.

Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 4631. I oppose this bill because it would make significant changes to Federal employees' ability to travel to conferences and meetings.

Although I appreciate the sponsors' efforts to ensure oversight on travel expenditures, I'm not sure they realize the impact that this legislation would have on science and technology, which is the engine of American innovation.

This bill institutes prohibitions and impediments that would hinder American scientists' ability to collaborate and communicate with scientists at other institutions and laboratories. Now, to be sure, they can probably get around these prohibitions and impediments, but we should not be putting these in place in the first matter.

As a scientist, I know firsthand how important scientific conferences and meetings are. The informal conversations, as well as the formal presentations and poster sessions and everything else that goes into it between scientists from different institutions, lead to new collaborations that have the promise of new discoveries. These are not fancy junkets.

Now, people often ask students, well, what is science. What's so special about science? Why does it work? Well, it works because one of its fundamental tenets is communication.

To be sure, there are various ways to have communication, but scientific conferences are critically important. In a recent op-ed by the presidents of the American Chemical Society and the president of the American Physical Society, they discuss, for example, an anticancer drug that was the result of collaboration between a team of scientists from three laboratories that took place at conferences.

This bill would hinder that kind of collaboration. Just about any scientific society in this country can give you examples where large numbers of federally sponsored researchers go off to

conferences. It happens in plasma physics. It happens in microbiology. It happens in AIDS policy and AIDS research.

In a time when the Federal Government should be making science a priority, passing a bill that would make scientists jump through hurdles and get around impediments would, in fact, weaken American scientists, weaken American science, and impede the ability of American scientists to innovate.

That is not wise. This is not the way to build our economy. We should be investing more in research and development, which means, of course, investing in scientists, but also investing in their ability to pursue science.

We should be spending more on international conferences. We should be spending more on national conferences. We should be spending more on national laboratories. We should be spending more on public and private research and development for the sake of jobs, for the sake of our economic vitality, for the sake of the quality of life of Americans. This is not the way to build our economy and to foster innovation.

I urge my colleagues to vote ``no."

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Do you think that the Congress of the United States might do better if we don't meet in person, if we stay home and get on conference calls every once in a while and phone in?

I don't think so. I think the gains that are made in good legislation that come from conferences, as we gather here for votes, on the side between votes, is invaluable. The same can be said many times over for microbiology, for plasma physics, for--let's go through a long list.